

Department of Hudson's Bay /

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DEPARTMENT OF HUDSON'S BAY. BY REV. G. A. BELCOURT.*

* Translated from the French by Mrs. Letitia May.

The discovery of America, by Christopher Columbus , in 1496. gave a new impulse to the spirit of enterprize. From that period, bold navigators launched fearlessly out into the broad bosom of the ocean, and continued to make, from time to time, new discoveries in the field which had been laid open to them by the noble and devoted perseverance of their great predecessor.

It was about the year 1607, that the celebrated navigator, Henry Hudson , then in the employ of the English, discovered the magnificent Bay to which he gave his name; and in 1611, pursuing his researches, he penetrated five hundred leagues farther north than any traveler had done before him. It was this same year that two missionaries, Fathers Masse and Biart , arrived in Canada.

Some time after this period, the English, in order to profit by the discoveries which had been made in their name by Hudson , commenced some settlements in the vicinity of Hudson's Bay, and entered into a kind of traffic for furs with the Indians, who descended, during the summer season, the various streams which pour their waters into this Bay, bringing with them these trophies of their success in the chase.

These settlers built at first only a few houses in which to pass the winter. Here, they suffered greatly from the scurvy which broke out among them. But the strong desire of 208 gain which actuated them, rendered them regardless alike of the ravages of disease and the rigor of the climate.

The French of Canada wished also to establish themselves in this region, pretending that, as that country formed a part of the same continent as New France, they had the right to trade with the natives that high up and even higher. Several of their adventurers had penetrated as far north as the Bay of Hudson, as early as the year 1656, and in the intermediate time between that and the year 1680, when Groselillers and Radisson left Quebec for the above named Bay with two vessels, which were but poorly equipped for such an expedition. The persons engaged in this enterprize only succeeded in erecting a few forts, whence they sallied forth and attacked the English settlements in the neighborhood, and were in their turn attacked by them; thus exhibiting in the horrors of civilization more cruelty than the savages with whom they had come to trade.—Such have been, at every period, among the sad effects of an inordinate love of gain. These dissensions between the English and the French did not cease till the ratification of the treaty of Utrecht.

The disease and dangers to which they were exposed in these perilous enterprizes, caused the French to take with them, on such occasions, a confessor; and it was in this capacity that Father Delmas , a Jesuit and native of Tours, embarked for Hudson's Bay. When he arrived there, he offered to remain in the fort, in order to serve as father confessor to the garrison which was left there; and at the same time, to learn the language of the natives, so that he might, afterwards be enabled to announce to them the Gospel of a Savior. The following year, the vessel which was to bring provisions to these persons, not being able to effect an entrance into the Bay, the larger number of them perished from hunger and disease. But the death of the first missionary to this country was still more tragical.

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Only eight men had survived in the fort, five of whom having gone out to hunt in the snow to procure the means of subsistence, left in the fort, Father Delmas , a surgeon, and a tailor. Upon their return about five days afterwards, they were surprised at not finding

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either the surgeon or the priest. They questioned the tailor as to what had become of his companions, and the confusion he betrayed in his answers, together with some marks of blood which they discovered on the snow, determined them to seize him and place him in irons. This miserable wretch, seeing himself under arrest, and pressed by the remorse of his conscience, revealed the whole story of his guilt. He said he had long nourished bitter feelings towards the surgeon, and had taken advantage of their absence to wreak his malice, which he did by murdering him one morning, and dragging his body to the river, threw it into the water, through a hole in the ice, which he had cut for the purpose. This being effected, he returned to the fort and sought for the priest, whom he found in the chapel, preparing to say mass. He requested an interview with him; but the holy father told him to wait till he should have performed the duty in which he was then engaged.

The mass being finished, the murderer discovered to the priest all that he had done, testifying his despair, and the fear he had that when their companions should return to the fort, they would put him to death for his crime. "That is not what you have the most to fear," replied the father, "Our number is too small, and we need your Services too much, for you to dread anything from your companions; and I promise to oppose as much as I can their molesting you.—But I exhort you to recognize the enormity of your crime before God, and repent sincerely for having committed so heinous an offence against his law. Let it be your care to appease the anger of God, and I will take care to appease 13 210 that of your fellow-men." The holy father added, that if the culprit wished it, he would go out to meet the hunters and try to soften their feelings of resentment in advance, and induce them to promise him that they would not punish him as his crime merited.

The priest started out to do as he proposed: but he was hardly gone, when the tears of the miserable tailor returned with double power. He began to think that the priest was deceiving him; and that his real object in going was to prepare the others, so that they might the more surely execute condign punishment upon him. He determined upon the execution Of a second crime to try and hide the first; and seizing his gun and axe, he ran after the priest calling to him to stop; and when he came near enough, he discharged

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the contents of his gun at him, and wounded him. The poor priest to escape the fury of this monster, threw himself upon a mass of ice which floated in the river. The furious wretch pursued him, and struck him repeated blows with his axe till he had killed him, and then threw his body into the river. In a few minutes after his return to the fort, the hunters came in, and seeing all these suspicious circumstances, threw him into chains, when he confessed all.

They resolved to keep him in chains until the arrival of the vessel upon which they were to embark; but before any assistance reached them, the fort was attacked by the English. This little garrison made a brave resistance, and kept up so furious a discharge from their artillery that the enemy were led to believe that their number was considerable, and retired to reinforce themselves; after which, they returned again to the attack. The besieged seeing that resistance would be vain, retired secretly through an opening which had been made by a cannon, and passed into the woods, leaving the tailor alone, bound as he was. Of his subsequent fate nothing is known. Of the five men who escaped from the fort, only two succeeded, after great hardships and fatigue, in reaching Montreal; and it is from them that we have these details.

The tragical fate of this missionary did not deter another, Father Sylvie , from going also some time after, to the Bay of Hudson, to preach the gospel to the savages. But he lost his health in the undertaking, and was soon obliged to return to Quebec; where he never recovered from his sickness, but died a victim to his zeal in a good cause.

This defeat of the French in the Bay of Hudson, did not remain without vengeance. In 1695, M. D'Iberville , a celebrated French captain, then in Canada, received orders to take possession of some English posts on the shores of Hudson's Bay. Two vessels of war were consequently equipped for the purpose; and Father Seigny was appointed confessor. He was the third missionary who went to Hudson's Bay. One of the English forts was taken in its turn without a blow. Two years afterwards this fort was re-taken by the English, and Father Seigny made prisoner, and carried to England, whence

he passed over into France, and thence returned to Canada. These mutual hostilities extended to Fort Albany, on James' Bay; which was taken and re-taken several times. The celebrated Chevalier Sevis , who gave his name to Point Sevis at Quebec, distinguished himself particularly at this place. This warrior would have rendered himself justly celebrated, if, overcome by resentment unworthy of a great man, he had not betrayed the interests of his country and turned his arms against her.

More than one-third part of the waters contained in the immense basin of Hudson's Bay, are brought in by a single river, called at that time Bourbon River by the French, and Nelson River by the English.

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The result of these wars between the two contending people was, that the English obtained the sole occupancy of the neighborhood of Hudson's Bay, and both shores of Nelson River. But many French companies, established partly at Montreal, continued the commerce in furs; which they Practiced almost exclusively in all the rest of the north-western part of North America, extending their expeditions even so far as the Rocky Mountains. Many places in these regions still retain the names of celebrated personages and houses which existed at the time of their discovery; as for instance, Lake Bourbon, Dauphin River, Fort la Reine; and a missionary, of whom I have not been able to learn the name, made several days march up the river Saskadjiwan, (*Kisiskadjiwan, current which turns round .*)

A tradition of the savages near the Lake of the Woods, reports that the French travelers in passing, were invariably accompanied by a missionary; and that one of them was killed on this same lake, and his companions all either killed or drowned. The following is the manner in which they relate this occurrence: Early one morning, a French canoe, manned with eight men, left a trading house, which the French had built about the middle of the Lake of the Woods, and stopped upon an island near to the last pass, to enter the river of Rainy Lake. The atmosphere was so still that the wind could hardly be felt. Having

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built a fire, to take their repast, the smoke rose up, and was perceived by a party of Sioux warriors, who were approaching the same island, by a branch of the river of Rainy Lake, called *The road of War* . These having landed on the opposite side of the isle unperceived by the French, fell upon them unawares, and massacred the missionary and some Of his companions; the others, throwing themselves into the water, in order to cross 213 over to some other islands, were drowned. This event took place, according to the report of the savages, about the year 1750.

Although the desire of all these missionaries had been to learn the language of the different natives among whom they traveled, in order to be useful to them, as well as to the white traders, it does not appear that any of them remained long enough in any place to acquire that knowledge, or establish any permanent mission. The Cavalier McKenzie criticises the course they pursued to civilize the Indians as not being one proper to enable them to succeed in their design; but I think his criticism is bolder than just; for the history of the Society of Jesus , in the two Americas, proves the wisdom of their measures. And the success of all their missions, has gained the applause of all those who have visited them. I am disposed rather to think that the reason that they established no permanent missions in these remote regions is, that about the time they thought of forming them their Order was suspended, and the Society with the true spirit of obedience renounced all their enterprises, and gave up the houses they had already established into the hands of the bishops of the dioceses wherever they found themselves.

We have no evidence that the French ascended higher up than three days march above Lake Bourbon, along the river Pas, or Saskadjiwan. The first who left Canada with views of commerce in this country, was Thomas Ourry , who ascended the river Saskadjiwan in 1766. Up to this time the Canadian traders did not venture any higher up than Grand Portage, at the northern extremity of Lake Superior. His voyage, which proved to be very profitable, encouraged others to follow his example. James Finley made a voyage also which was 214 equally as happy. But as these adventurers, in traveling thus far into the interior, intercepted the furs which had before this time been brought by the Indians to

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Hudson's Bay, the English traders became jealous of them and advanced further into the interior. From this we date the commencement of a long series of disorders and excesses, of which the details were the more revolting, as the certainty of impunity gave free course to all the passions.

Joseph Frobisher undertook to penetrate farther than any of his predecessors had done, and went as far as Churchill, which is beyond 59° of latitude. The following year, his brother went as far as *L' Isle a la Crosse* . In 1778, Peter Pond entered English river, thus called by Frobisher , and pursued his course to the River L' Orignal, where he passed the winter. One day after he had made some of the Indians drunk, he was so annoyed by them that to rid himself of their importunity, he gave one of them so large a dose of laudanum that he was plunged into an eternal sleep. This murder cost the life of a trader and all of his assistants. And any trader, or any white man, who would have dared to show his face in this place, or on the Assiniboine river, would have fallen a victim to the sanguinary vengeance of these exasperated savages, had not the small pox broken out among them, and produced a diversion in favor of the whites. This dreadful scourge spread terror and desolation among all these people, Whoever was not attacked by it fled into the most profound depths of the forest, far from the presence of the whites. About two-thirds of their population perished. Their corpses lay on the ground; the masters became the food of their own dogs or of the wolves. From this period is dated also the army of the great picotte (quarrel.) This was about 1780.

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This same year, Peter Pond formed a partnership with Mr. Wadin . These two men were of a character too opposite to be united, as it soon appeared. In a festival given by Pond to Wadin , the latter was killed by the former, who shot him in the thigh with a pistol. The ball broke the artery, the hemorrhage from which could not be stopped; so he died. Pond was tried and acquitted at Montreal; but he was not acquitted in the eyes of the people who heard of the transaction. And in general, the judgment pronounced in his case was

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considered as unheard of, or as containing too much of the mysterious to do honor to the judge who pronounced it.

In 1781, four canoes filled with traders, went up as high as “ *Portage de la Loche* ,” some high lands between the Saskadijwan river and the Polar Sea. At last, in 1783, was formed the company, which has since become so famous, under the name of the North Western Company. The first factors were Benjamin and Joseph Frobisher and Simon McTavish . It was first composed of sixteen partners. P. Pond and P. Pangman refused to join it, though the former changed his mind the next year. P. Pangman joined with Gregory, McLeod and McKenzie in 1785.

These opposing interests were the cause of disorders of every kind; so much so, that these companies rendered themselves despicable even in the eyes of the savages, who were astonished to find that their own manners were much better than those of men, whom in other respects they regarded as being greatly superior to themselves. In one of these difficulties, Gregory saw one of his companions killed before his eyes, and several of their assistants wounded. It was easy to be conceived, that their common interest demanded a sincere and cordial union. This they comprehended somewhat later; and at last in 1787 all these companies united together, and thus increased the number of 216 partners to 26. The 40,000 pounds sterling, which their commerce yielded them at that time, was trebled in less than eleven years. In 1798, the company increased the number to 46, which caused some dissatisfaction, and led a small number of them to form a separate company. Nevertheless the Northwest Company had become too powerful to dread any such divisions. It continued to prosper, in spite even of the opposition of the Hudson Bay Company.

This last company took advantage, as it still does, of a charter granted by Charles II, to his cousin Rupert . This document, although illegal according to the British constitution, has been strongly sustained. It grants the most absolute powers, and concedes a sovereignty mere despotic than Charles himself possessed. Though the governmental department

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has sufficiently expressed themselves upon the subject of the illegality of this contract, yet the friends of this company have always been so powerful as to prevent any official declaration to this effect, by contending that the subject should first undergo a discussion in court. Thus, those who are opposed to the pretensions of this company, not having enough of money to sustain the process; fearing that gold and favor would prove the stronger argument, find themselves obliged to submit to a usurpation which they cannot prevent.

Though they complained of these abuses a few years ago by petition, which was ably sustained at London, and which occasioned a great deal of excitement in England, the only effect produced here, was to abate in a small degree the boldness of the pretensions of this company, which tended to a perfect tyranny. In proof of this, I will adduce a few instances of their impositions: On one occasion, they seized the effects of a hunter, upon suspicion that he might exchange some of them with the Indians for furs. On another occasion they caused a hunter to be imprisoned for having given 217 one of his overcoats to a naked Indian, for about its value in rat skins. They also refuse to allow the missionaries to receive furs to sustain the expenses of public worship; whilst the Indians cannot obtain any money from the company for their furs; and forbid the missionaries to buy leather or skins to protect their feet from the cold. These, and a thousand other grievances call so loudly for redress, that I think a small increase of the burden will cause the evil to correct itself.

About the year 1812, the North West Company had more than sixty trading posts west of the longitude of Lake Bourbon, and as high up as Slave Lake, where they sustained a prosperous commerce. This success only inflamed still more the jealousy of the Hudson Bay Company. Everything that could be imagined, to discourage their adversaries or hinder their prosperity, was resorted to without scruple or the least regard to human life. They went so far as to burn up their bark canoes and destroy their traps which were in the water, the sole means of subsistence in many places.

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Among other tragical adventures, I relate the following: Nineteen travelers came from Canada to join the company of Bourgeois . Mr. B. * * * * They all died of misery and hunger. Mr. B. himself survived through the assistance of Mr. Lavord , a half-breed and expert hunter. Another traveler survived in a most mysterious manner. It was suspected that he had lived upon the dead bodies of his companions who had perished. After this catastrophe, Mr. B. found himself most happy that his dog had outlived these days of misery.

The hostilities which existed between the two companies assumed a more formal aspect about the time of the establishment of the colony of Lord Selkirk , that is, from 1812 to 1816. In 1815, eatables being very scarce in the establishment, the governor of the colony issued an order, forbidding any one to take any provisions whatever of food, out of the boundary of the colony. Now it was well known that the company of the North West, ought to try to send provisions through this colony, for the numerous travelers who were coming from Montreal, and who depended upon their succor, to enable them either to continue their route or return to Canada. The agents of this company having been informed in time, of the order of the governor of the colony through which they had to pass, when they were descending the river Assiniboine, halted before they entered the territory of the colony, and sent a detachment of cavalry, composed of half-breeds, under the control of Cuthbert Grant , at that time clerk of this company, with orders to go by land to the mouth of Red River, in order to escort the canoes of provisions which were expected down every day. Though they made a large circuit in compassing the angle formed by the Assiniboine and Red Rivers, this company of half-breeds were recognized from the fort of the colony, when they reached the mouth of the river Assiniboine. Immediately upon seeing them, Governor Semple ordered out two pieces of cannon, and sent in great haste to assemble the settlers in the neighborhood, and without waiting for them to come together, took the field with such persons as he could collect at the moment. The half-breeds, who saw from a distance these movements near the fort, stopped to make observations. At last seeing an armed force coming out against them, they prepared to make vigorous resistance, with

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orders, nevertheless, not to make an attack. When the English came within gun shot, Mr. Grant sent a cavalier in advance to make some arrangement with the governor; but the messenger, far from being listened to, received a discharge from a gun, which he avoided only by precipitating himself from his horse. He then hastened back to his companions. A combat immediately commenced, which lasted only a few hours, and was so well conducted on the part of the half-breeds, that it cost them only one man; whilst on the part of the English, the governor and nineteen of his men lay on the field of battle.

This took place in the spring of 1816, at the time that Lord Selkirk, who had come to reside in Canada, was on his way to visit his colony. He was encamped at the extremity of Lake Superior, on an isle called "*Ile de Traverse*" opposite, though at a distance from Fort William, the principal depot of the North Western Company, when he learned the news of what had taken place at Red River, and the death of his protege, Governor Semple. As he was escorted by a company of veterans, he re-embarked with the intention of taking Fort William, which he effected without a blow; for as his approach was unsuspected, he found the gates open. He thus took possession of this post and passed the winter there.

The next spring, he visited his colony, where he left some soldiers, and returned to Canada by way of the United States. After his arrival at Montreal, he instituted a suit against the North-Western Company, much to the satisfaction of the Bar, both of Upper and Lower Canada, who were the only persons benefited by it; for the case was removed to England, where it was never judged, after having cost enormous sums.

During his sojourn at Red River, Lord Selkirk had remarked that this little community were altogether destitute of the principles of religion and morals; accordingly, he suggested to the Catholics of the place that they should address a petition to the Bishop of Quebec, to send them a missionary. His Grace Joseph Octave Plessie, then Bishop of Quebec, granted their request most willingly, and sent them, the following spring, 1818, Mr. Joseph Norb't Provencher, then curate of Kamouraska, as his Grand Vicar, 220 and Mr. S.J.N.

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Dumoulin , then Vicar of Quebec. Having quitted Montreal the 19th of May, they reached the plato of their destination the 16th of July.

At their arrival, the colony was the emblem of misery.—They had not yet tried to plant, except with the hoe, and that only to procure seed for the following year. During two consecutive years, the grasshoppers made such devastation among the crops, that they did not even gather seed, and were obliged to send for them to Prairie du Chien, on the Mississippi river, about a thousand miles distant. They also brought chickens from that place, which multiplied very rapidly. The crop of 1822 was passable, but the rats caused great destruction. As they had not yet procured cats, the country was infested by these vermin.

As the few animals brought from Europe by the Scotch Colonies, had been destroyed during the troubles of the preceding years, they were obliged to procure some from Prairie du Chien. Some individuals imported several pairs of oxen, and some cows. At that time, a cow sold for £25. In 1825, an American drove four or five hundred oxen and cows to that place. The cows sold at from £4 to £10 each. Their number has since considerably increased.

In 1825, the snow fell the 15th of October in great quantity, and remained on the ground. Still more fell during the winter, which was one of the coldest which had passed for twenty-five years. The snow melted suddenly about the last of April. The water had already risen in the streams as high as the banks, when the ice, which had scarcely diminished in thickness, was dragged away by the violence of the current, and taking a straight course, rooted up trees and demolished edifices and whatever found itself in its way. The water rose five feet in the church of St. Boniface, nearly opposite the mouth of the river Assiniboine, which is one of the most elevated spots in that vicinity.

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The fish, the principal resource of the inhabitants at this season of the year, were dispersed in this immense extent of water, and the fishermen were not able to take them. —To crown their misfortunes, the bison that were ordinarily found in abundance near the river Pembina, went away, and about fifteen persons who had calculated on this resource, perished from hunger. The waters did not retire entirely till the 20th of July; when some persons risked sowing barley, which came to maturity.

After so many scourges of different kinds: one would think that the survivors would have been ready to abandon forever a country which offered only disasters and difficulties. Some of them did indeed leave and go to the United States; others lived like the savages, by hunting and fishing, for several years, after which they returned to the culture of the earth; at last, having had good crops during several years, the remembrance of their misfortunes was effaced. The same scourge has not visited the place in a general manner till this year, 1852. The water raised a foot higher than in 1826, and the losses occasioned by it are still greater and more difficult to repair. A greater quantity of fencing, grain, and property of all kinds, has been carried away and destroyed by the water; then, the lumber being all destroyed or carried away to some distance from the colony, the expenses of building are much more considerable. We at St. Joseph's of Pembina, are beyond the reach of these misfortunes.

We have seen that the visit of Lord Selkirk, to Red river, occasioned missionaries to be sent to that colony. The process which was instituted against the North Western Company, though never judged, was also productive of some favorable results. The great expense of sustaining this process, joined to those occasioned by the constant opposition of a rival interest, and still more, weariness of a life of incessant contentions, induced these two companies to unite, 222 under the name and privileges of the Hudson Bay Company. Some of the members of the North Western Company, not willing to be known under a title which they had despised, preferred to retire from the commerce.

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The union of these two companies took place in 1822. Since that period, the profits of the company have been Very great; but, on the other hand, the people of the country have suffered by it in inverse proportion. The price of furs as well as that of merchandise given in exchange, was regulated entirely by the company. The seller came and deposited his furs, and took from the trader's store, in exchange, such things as he wished; beginning by the articles of first necessity, and stopping when he was told he had enough. This absolute power engendered, as can be readily conceived, many abuses. The traders, seeing the people so submissive, became arrogant, and gave themselves up, without any shame, to every excess of immorality. At last, missionaries being sent out in every direction, men who had been civilized were made to remember their first education; a reform of conduct was the result, and honesty recovered its rights.

There was a mission formed near the Rocky mountains, above the river Saskadjiwan, on the little lake of Manitou. It was established in 1843, by Mr. J. Baptiste Thibault , a priest of the Diocese of Quebec, who lived there till 1851. He left in his place, Mr. Bourassa , a priest of the same Diocese of Quebec. Another mission was since formed at the Isle of La Crosse, by Mr. S. Lafleche , a priest of the District of Three Rivers, and Mr. Als Tache , a priest of the Diocese of Montreal. They both received a mission for this post, where they rendered themselves in 1845. Since that time, several priests of the Society of Oblats of Marseilles, have been sent on a mission to these mountains. Father Faraud has penetrated farther north than any of 223 the others. He went as far as Great Slave Lake. Chapels for worship have been erected in each one of these missions. Among all these churches, only one (the Cathedral of St. Boniface) is built of stone; all the others are wooden edifices.

The parish of St. Francis Xavier, of *Prairie du Cheval Blanc* , [White Horse Plains,] about 18 miles from the mouth of the river Assiniboine, existed as early as 1830. This spot is the least exposed to inundation of all the surrounding country. This parish is composed of emigrants from Pembina, where there were several commercial houses, and quite a

number of farmers. But when Maj. Long , of the United States, had verified the point of the 49° degree of latitude, Pembina proving to be on the American territory, the Hudson Bay Company caused the whole population to remove to their side, by menacing them with a refusal to let them have any supplies from their stores if they remained. Their missionary, Mr. Dumoulin , being returned to Canada, the whole colony finished by emigrating, though very reluctantly, to *Prairie du Cheval Blanc* .

Twelve miles higher up on the river Assiniboine, I built a chapel among the Saulteurs, where I had a very flourishing mission from 1832 till 1848, when I quitted this diocese to go to Pembina. During this time I built another chapel, and founded a farm about 300 miles from the colony, towards the east, at a point called Wabassimong, on the River Winipik. This mission was committed to the Oblats of Marseilles the year before I left it. At last being arrived at Pembina, in 1849, I constructed a chapel on Red River, a mile below the mouth of Pembina River, on the most advantageous site we could select. The inundations having decided us to establish ourselves near to Mount Pembina, about 40 miles from Red River, I built another chapel of wood, 50 feet by 25, two stories high.

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I would give you an account of the labors of the Protestant clergy, but I suppose you have received information on the subject from themselves. Suffice it for me to say, that the total population of the colony of Selkirk is about 7,000 souls, of which a little more than one-half are Catholics, the others are divided between the Church of England, Presbyterians and Methodists. There is on Red River but one society of nuns not cloistered. These came from Canada; and are of the order of the Sisters of Charity called "Grey Nuns" (*Soeurs-Grises*). Though instruction was not the object of their institution, they have been invited to this calling, and have fulfilled its important functions with success since their arrival in 1844.

MANNERS OF THE INHABITANTS OF THE COUNTRY.

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The population of the country divides itself into three classes, viz: The colonists who came from Canada or Europe; the half-breeds and their children, and the savages. The Canadians and the Europeans have brought with them that spirit of nationality which leads them to esteem themselves above the other inhabitants—half breeds, &c. For the first, nothing is so good as at Montreal; for the others, nothing is like London. The half breeds being more numerous, and endowed with uncommon health and strength, esteem themselves the lords of the land. Though they hold the middle place between civilized and savage life, one can say, that in respect to morality, they are as good as many civilized people. Their character is gentle and benevolent. Their greatest vice is prodigality; they have also an extreme tendency to the use of strong drinks; nevertheless, the vivacity of their faith has wrought wonders among them in this respect. A number of them have taken a pledge to abstain entirely from the use of all intoxicating liquors; and many others, without having done as much, still hold themselves within just bounds. Generally speaking, excesses of this kind are rare; nevertheless it is to be wished that the Hudson Bay Company could be made to appreciate how glorious it would be for them to cease to import intoxicating liquors into the country. But their insatiability of gain is such that there is no danger that either humanity or honor should ever have weight with them. Such a traffic, in a savage country like this, is an abomination against which the bishops and ministers have always expostulated in vain. Though the half breeds lose much of their time in idleness, I do not think this owes its origin to the vice of indolence, but rather to the absence of all commercial interests; that is to say, to the want of enterprises passably lucrative, or of rewards sufficiently inviting to make them sustain the fatigues of labor. For they are capable of enduring to an astonishing degree the most horrible fatigues; and they undertake them with the greatest cheerfulness when circumstances call for it. They love gaming, but have no great passion for it; and it is rare that any one of them delivers himself to any excess in this vice. They have a taste for music; and above all for the violin; and a great many of them know how to play. They have a tendency to superstition, which arises from their origin; particularly in respect to dreams. Though religion teaches them what they ought to think about these things, they feel invincibly impressed with a sentiment

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of hope or fear, according to the nature of the dream. The third class of the population of the country are the savages, who have a still stronger spirit of nationality than the other two, though they admit that they are not so skillful in other respects.

The immense valley that empties its waters into Hudson Bay is inhabited by a great number of savage tribes, who all spring from four mother nations, absolutely distinguished from each other by their language.

1st. All the people who border on the northern sea, from 14 226 McKenzie's river to the Atlantic ocean, belong to the tribe of the Esquimaux. All speak nearly the same language, have the same usages, same superstitions, and the same manners. Small in stature, their physiogomy is entirely characteristic; and offers nothing which attaches itself to the other American nations. They never form any alliances with ether nations; who regard them as being as far inferior to them, as they themselves are inferior to the white. The name of the Esquimaux is a corruption of the word Weashkimek, *the eaters of raw fish* ; this word is Saulteur. They have like the other savage nations, the use of the drum. Their habitations are usually made of snow or ice, and are warmer than one would be tempted to believe; but they have a humidity which is insupportable to any person not born in them. As they drink whale oil with great delight, they expose themselves to great dangers to catch this animal; which proves that they are not destitute of bravery. Without occupying themselves with the reflection that the fisherman and his canoe would make only a mouthful for one of these marine monsters, over whom they often pass in the chase of the whale; nor that with one blow of his tail, the whale himself, could throw them to the third heaven, like to the feeble bird, which strikes with its bill the crow who comes to deprive it of its young, they throw their slight darts at the back of the enormous fish, till they have rendered themselves masters of it. As no missionary has ever lived among this people, it is impossible to form any just estimate of their mental capacities.

2d. The nation of Montagnes, who are divided into several different tribes, are the neighbors of the Esquimaux, and inhabit a strip of land parallel to theirs, from the Rocky

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mountains to the neighborhood of Hudson's Bay, and extending southward to the river Saskadjiwan. They are perhaps of all the savages of America, the only ones 227 who have no kind of superstition or worship of imaginary beings. Great admirers of the whites, they imitate them as much as they can. This natural disposition, joined to the absence of all religious prejudice, has given to the missionaries who are sent there, every advantage they could desire. They are now nearly all Christians, excepting a certain number of families whom the bonds of polygamy, which they find difficult to break, hold still at a distance.

The name of Montagne is not a translation of the savage word *Wetshipweyanah*—*having the dress pointed*—because the cap, which covers their heads, is pointed and sewed to a cloak or sack which they wear, which under certain points of view makes them appear pointed at the top. This word is also of the Saulteurs language. They live by hunting the cariboo, and some by hunting the bison; and on the fish with which all their lakes abound. These people are not warlike, no more than the Esquimaux.

3d. The Crees who inhabit the two sides of the river Saskadjiwan, and with whom we should join all the Mashkegons, who belong to the same family, and who extend in all the country which borders the Bay of Hudson on the west, south and east, in a word, all the marshy country. The mother nation of these two numerous tribes seem to be the nation of the Saulteuse, which extends from Canada to the river Saskadjiwan, where they are mixed with the Crees, and are known under the name of *Nakkawinininiwak*—the men of divers races. The word Crees is also not a translation of the savage word *Kinishtinak*—being held by the winds. That is to say, the inhabitants of those places, where the slightest wind keeps them from travelling: from whence it appears, that the Crees originally inhabited the shores of the great lakes, such as Lake Superior; perhaps, also, certain portions of the Lake of the Woods, which one 228 cannot cross except when the weather is very calm, and which they certainly inhabited at one time.

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The word Mashkegon is a corruption of Omashkekok,—the inhabitants of the marshes. The only way of traveling in all the immense region which they inhabit, is in canoes. I have met old men, in traveling through their country, who had never seen a horse.

The word Saulteur, which seems to have been given to this nation from their having a long time inhabited the Sault Ste. Marie, is not a translation of the savage name Odjibwek. This word has been the object of a great many suppositions: Some say it was given to this nation on account of the form of their plaited shoes— *teibwa* , plaited; but this interpretation is not admissible, for the word does not contain the least allusion to shoes. Others say that it comes from the form the mouth assumes in pronouncing Certain words, wishing always to hold on to the adjective *teibwa* ; this is not more satisfactory. It is not uncommon that a word is somewhat changed when applied to a man or a nation. I could give a number of examples of this. I would venture then to say that the word Odjibwek comes from Shibwe; in order to make a proper noun Oshibwek, in the plural the pronouncing slowly of *shib* —root, to draw out; that is to say, to lengthen out a word by the slow pronunciation of its syllables; the particle *we* signifying articulate, pronounce; the *k* is an animated plural, which here can only be applied to men. In truth, the pronunciation of the Saulteuse characterizes them in an eminent manner.—The Ottawas, the Algonquins, the *Tetes de Boule* , the Montagnes of Canada, are so many tribes which belong to the same family. We must not confound the Montagnes of Canada with those of the North, who have nothing in common except the name. The Saulteurs and the Crees have always been intimately united; and they have the same 229 usages and the same superstitions, to which they are extremely attached.

Their principal religious meeting takes place every spring, about the time when all the plants begin to awaken from their long winter sleep and renew their life, and commence to bud. The ticket of invitation is a piece of tobacco sent by the oldest person of the nation, indicating the place of rendezvous to the principal persons of the tribe. This is a national feast, in which each individual is interested, being the feast of medicines. Each head

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of a family is the physician of his children, but he cannot become so without having a preliminary instruction and initiation into the secrets of medicine. It is at this feast that each one is received. All the ceremonies which they perform are emblematic; and signify the virtue of plants in the cure of the various maladies of man.

Another superstition, proper to cure the evils which have place more in the imagination than in the body, is the *Nipikkiwan* . It consists in drawing out the evil directly, in drawing the breath and spitting in the eyes of the sick person. The pretended cause of the suffering is sometimes a stone, a fruit, the point of an arrow, or even a medicine, wrapped up in cotton. One cannot conceive how much these poor people submit with blind faith to these absurdities.

Lastly, curiosity, and the desire of knowing the future, has invented the *Teisakkiwin* . It consists of certain formalities, songs, invocations of spirits, and bodily agitations which are so energetic, that you are carried back to the time of the ancient Sybils; they seem to say to you, *Deus ecce Deus* , and then submitting to the questions of the spectators, for whom they always have a reply, whether it be to tell what passes at a distance, 230 or reveal the place where objects which have been lost may be found. As the skill of the prophet consists in replying in ambiguous terms upon all subjects of which he has not been able to procure information in advance he is always sure of success, either more or less striking. Besides, as one is ordinarily predisposed to the marvellous, anything that aids an imposture is easily overlooked.

I knew a man who was in great trouble on account of his horses, which he could not find just at the moment when all the hunters were about to go upon an expedition. Seeing he could not accompany them without his horses, he used every effort to find them. At last an old Saulteur came to him and proposed if he would give him a net (a net used to catch fish) he would go immediately and invoke his manitous; and he was very sure they would give him the desired information. As one can readily suppose, the offer was accepted; and after the ordinary formalities, the juggler said he saw the number of the

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horses, and described them otherwise faithfully, naming also exactly the place where they could be found. They were in effect found in the place he had indicated. Now this old man had himself hid the horses, in order to obtain from the owner, the net which he knew he possessed; and which he himself needed. I could cite many other instances of the same kind.

Dreams are for the Saulteurs, revelations; and the bird, the animal, or even a stone, or whatever it may be which is the principal subject of the dream, becomes a tutelary spirit, for which the dreamer has a particular veneration. As dreams are more apt to visit a sick person, when the brain is more subject to these aberrations, many such have a number of dreams, and consequently many tutelary spirits. They preserve images, and statues in their medicine bag, and never lose sight of them; but carry 231 them about wherever they go. The faith of the Saulteurs in their medicine is such, that they believe a disease can be thrown into an absent person, or that certain medicines can master the mental inclinations, such as love or hatred. Thus it is the interest of these old men to pander to the young. It cannot be denied that the Saulteurs have some knowledge of medicine. And I have myself witnessed several cures, which did honor to their physician. I have, above all, followed with great interest the progress of a cure which an English doctor had pronounced incurable, nevertheless the Saulteur doctor pronounced its cure very easy; which indeed he effected in a very short time. The disease was erysipelas, degenerated into ulcers.

The Saulteurs language is much richer than is commonly thought. It bears a great resemblance to the ancient languages. It has, like the Greek, the dual and the two futures. And like that language it has but few radical words, but their manner of forming words for the occasion, by the aid of these radicals, gives a great facility of expression, the same as in the Greek. The conjunction "and," either by hazard, or otherwise, is the same as in the Greek. This language is formed of radical and compound words. The radical words are commonly employed in the familiar style; but in oratorical style, the compound words are used. As for example, *Ishpa*, *Wadjin*, in compound style is *ishpatna*, the mountain is high; *mangeleya sipa*, the river is large; in the compound style is *mangittigweya*, &c.,

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this makes the learning of the language rather difficult at first, nearly equal to the acquiring of two languages; but in return for this, one obtains an extreme facility in expressing his thought with all the force he desires.

The Saulteurs have also their poetic style, which consists 232 more in suspensions and enigmatical phrases, than in words. Their songs contain only a few words, with a great many notes. Their music is very strange, and consists more in guttural sounds, than in modulations. Their intervals are generally *de tierce en tierce* , accompanied by a great many unisons. They have songs of war, of love and of worship.

Their writings are composed of arbitrary hieroglyphics, and the best writer is he who is most skillful in using such signs as most fully represent his thoughts. Though this manner of writing is very defective, it is nevertheless ingenious and very useful, and has this advantage over all other languages, since it paints the thoughts and not the words. For it remains for genius to discover the means of writing the thought, and not the word; just as figures represent numbers in all languages. Though the Saulteurs have no idea of the state they shall find themselves in after death, they believe in the existence of a future life. They have very strange ideas on this subject; in consequence of some of these, they place near the deceased his arms and the articles most necessary to life. Some have even gone so far as to have their best horse killed at their death, in order, as they said, to use him in traveling to the country of the dead. It is the general belief that the spirit returns to visit the grave of the deceased very often, so long as the body is not reduced to dust. During this space of time it is held a sacred duty, on the part of the relatives of the deceased, to make sacrifices and offerings, and celebrate festivals before the door of the tomb. In the time of fruits, they carry them in great abundance to the tomb, and he who nourishes himself with them after they have been deposited there, causes great joy to the parents and relations of the deceased. Although I have seen an old man who believed in metempsychosis, it is not 233 a belief of the nation; he probably received this thought elsewhere.

The Saulteurs have some knowledge of astronomy; they have names for the most remarkable constellations; they have names also for the lunar months; but their calculations, as can be conceived, are very imperfect, and they often find themselves in great embarrassment, and have recourse to us to solve their difficulties. The electric fluid manifested in thunder, the rays of light of the Aurora Borealis, are in their imagination animated beings; the thunders, according to them, are supernatural beings; and the rays of the Aurora Borealis are the dead who dance.

Their idea of the creation of the world goes no farther back than the deluge, of which they have still a tradition, the narration of which would fill volumes. This account is extremely amusing, and filled with wearisome episodes. Without attempting to narrate the whole of it here, I will tell that part which relates to the creation; "An immortal genius, seeing the water which covered the earth, and finding nowhere a resting place for his foot, ordered a Castor, an Otter, and other amphibious animals to plunge by turns into the water, and bring up a little earth to the surface. They were all drowned. The Rat, however, succeeded in reaching the bottom, and took some earth in his paws; but he died before he got back; yet his body rose to the surface of the water. The genius, Nenabojou, seeing that he had found earth, brought him to life, and employed him to continue the work. When there was a sufficient quantity of earth, he made a man, whom he animated with his breath?" This genius is not the Great Spirit, of whom they never speak except with respect; while Nenabojou is considered a buffoon of no gravity.

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This account contains one thing very important: It is that in speaking of the creation of plants, &c., it speaks of their nutritive properties; and thus offers a resource for the sustenance of life in times of scarcity; showing what roots, plants, and mosses can to a certain extent preserve life. Improvident, not to say more of them, like all savage nations, the Saulteurs pass rapidly from abundance to want.

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There grows in the prairies a kind of turnip which can appease hunger; when this root is chopped up, dried, and beaten, the Saulteurs make a soup of it, which, when mixed with a little meat, becomes very nourishing; and thus, the food which would scarcely have sufficed a single day, is made to last several days. There is also a wild onion, of which they make much use. The ginger which grows in the woods, is employed as pepper in their repasts. In the spring, they find a kind of root, the shape of which resembles a ligne, vulgarly called a *rat's tail*. It is very abundant, of a good flavor, and very nutritive. Another root named *ashkibwah*—that which is eaten raw—is very abundant, and contains much nutritive substance. The fibres of the trees, above all of the aspen, are used by them in time of scarcity; also, a kind of bush or shrub which is found in the woods, called pimattik.

In the rocky countries, there exists a kind of moss very well known to travelers, of which the utility has been appreciated in more than one adventurous circumstance. It is the famous *Tripe de Roche*. This moss is of the nature of the mushroom. As there are some mushrooms which are real poisons, so there is a kind of *Tripe de Roche* which, far from nourishing, produces death. That which is green, and has small, round leaves, is the most nourishing, and most easily digested. With 235 this, and a duck, a partridge, or a fish, one can make a succulent soup sufficient to nourish several men.

The Saulteurs have a great passion for gaming. They pass whole days and nights in play; staking all they have, even their guns and traps, and sometimes their horses. It has happened that, having nothing more, they have staked even their wives upon the play.

Their love of intoxicating liquors is, as among all the other savage tribes, invincible. A Saulteur who was convinced of religion, wished to become a Christian; but he could not be admitted without renouncing indulgence in drunkenness to excess. He complained bitterly, that the Hudson Bay Company had reduced his people to such a pitiable state, by bringing rum into the country of which they never would have thought if they had not tasted it. The Saulteurs are one of the most warlike of nations. From time immemorial, they have had the advantage over their numerous enemies, and pushed them to the north. They treat the

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vanquished with the most horrible barbarity. It is then that they are cannibals by virtue; for though we see sometimes among them cases of anthropophagy, they have such a horror of it that he who has committed this act is no longer sure of his life. They hold it a sacred duty to put him to death on the first favorable occasion. But during war, they make a glory of cannibalism. The feast of victory is very often composed of human flesh. One sees a trait of this barbarity in the names they give to their principal enemies; as for instance, the Sioux, whom they call *Wanak*. As I have remarked before, it is not rare that they add to or retrench a little their proper names, which renders their interpretation rather difficult for strangers. In the word I have mentioned, *bwan* is put for *obwan* which signifies a piece of flesh put on the spit; 236 thus the word *abwanak*, which they have finished by calling *bwanak* or *pwanak*, signifying, those whom one roasts on a spit. In their great war parties, after the victory, the Saulteurs build a great fire, then plant all around spits laden with the thighs, heads, and hearts, &c., of their enemies, after, which they return home.

4th. The Sioux, to whom we must join the Assiniboines, inhabit a portion of the valley of the Hudson Bay, viz: the upper part of the Red river, and the river Chayenne, which is tributary to it. But many endeavors have been made to conclude a solid peace with the Sioux; and though each time has been with the appearance of success, these acts of treason have always destroyed these bright hopes. The Saulteurs complain bitterly of their want of faith.

Might I be permitted to advance the opinion, that if the government could, without departing from its principles, afford protection to the Catholic missionaries, and such help as would enable them to evangelize this people, we would soon see what is now seen in Canada: two nations, the most hostile to each other, the Algonquins and the Iriquois, form two villages, which are separated from each other by a church, which is used in common by the two nations; where each one sings in turn in his own language the praises of the God of Peace who unites them. Arms, military forces, destruction of life from time to time, the extinction of a portion of those, might effect at last what is desired; but would it not be better to try to attain the same end by more charitable measures, which in sparing the

effusion of human blood, would establish the faith of treaties on a more solid basis than that of fear—on the persuasion of conscience? I will say no more in regard to this nation, seeing that you who are on the spot can obtain all the details to be desired.

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The nation of the Assiniboinés, who separated themselves from the Sioux, according to tradition, on account of family disputes, took its name from the rocks of the Lake of the Woods, where they first lived after their separation. Their name comes from *assin* , rock, and *bwan* , Sioux— *Sioux of the Rocks* . it is impossible to fix the date of this separation; for at the arrival of the first missionaries to Hudson's Bay, Father Gabriel Marest , in 1694 wrote, speaking of the Assiniboinés whom he called *Assinipoils* , that this tradition was regarded as being already very old.

The Assiniboinés are numerous, and from their habit of living in encampments, are formidable to their enemies. This tribe, like the Saulteurs and the Crees, their allies, are not hostile to the whites. A traveler can pass through this nation with more security for his life than in a civilized country; which cannot be said of the Sioux. One cannot travel upon the highlands of the Missouri and Red rivers, without being often seized with horror by the narrations occasioned by the view of places and scenes of a crowd of acts of barbarity and treason, that have been perpetrated by this people, of which, one sees in history but an example from time to time. It is a horrible sight to see, as I have seen in different places, the skeletons of human beings, confounded in a heap with the bones of savage animals. Without these imminent dangers, which such sights recall to the mind of the traveler, these prairies would appear a paradise. Filled with game of all kinds, they offer at each moment a new point of view, and a variety of perspective most astonishing. Lakes, where the herds of bison come to slake their thirst, and where the majestic swan and the wild goose repose themselves in passing. The limpid streams, where the beavers expose 238 their ingenious work to the admiring gaze; petrifications, mineral waters of various kinds, flowers and

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strange plants, all unite to amuse and interest the intelligent traveler in search of the useful and agreeable.

I will say nothing here of the chase of the bison, as I have already given a description of that, which has been published.

The nature of the territory separated from that of the United States by the 49th degree of latitude, is such, that it seems necessary that one should have first visited the country before determining the line and making a choice. With the exception of a straight strip of land, say a degree parallel to the 49th degree of latitude, all the rest of the country of the Bay of Hudson is filled with lakes, marshes, savannas and rocks. Except a small portion on which is established the colony of Seikirk, there is not a spot of land that will produce corn. One can hardly imagine the sad eventualities to which the people of this country are subjected, who can never count on the resources of agriculture, being 600 miles from any point where they can obtain supplies. It is thus that the people north of *Saskadjiwan* are exposed from time to time, to the terrible alternative of dying of hunger or of eating one another, when in the interval that the fisheries fail, it happens that the chase fails also.

It is for this reason that our neighbors of the colony of Selkirk view with envious eyes the beautiful territory which extends south of 49th degree, from Rainy Lake to the Rocky Mountains. The left bank of the river of Rainy Lake, for the space of about 80 miles, is covered with all kinds of wood, of which the extreme height indicates the fertility of the soil. The country which belongs to the United States, is filled with advantages in respect to water power. It is on account of the inferiority of the advantages of their territory, 239 that our neighbors feel a strong opposition to our establishment.

At the foot of the beautiful mountain of Pembina, which is more than 200 feet above the level of the river Pembina, which divides it, and on its first table rises the little village of St. Joseph. It is divided by squares of 12 chains, and subdivided by lots of 6 chains. Its streets are one chain (66ft.) wide, which adds to the beauty of the town, rendering

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the extinction of fire easier, and favoring the free circution of air and the health of the citizens. Every thing wears an air of vigor, in spite of the little protection they have thus far received from the general government. The least effective step, such as a garrison of soldiers, however feeble it might be, the construction of a public edifice, a court of justice, a prison, a house of correction, or anything that would prove the indubitable intention of government to protect us, would draw to this place a great portion of the population of Selkirk and elsewhere. The soil is very fertile, and the frosts never occasion any damage. Our gardens yield us an abundance of melons of all kinds; a fruit which is not known in the gardens of the Selkirkers. In 1851 the first frost felt at St. Paul was on the 6th or 7th of September; while at St. Josephs the first frost was not until the 2d or 3d of October. They raise potatoes which weigh about two pounds each, and carrots 18 inches long and 4 in diameter. If the country were explored it would show without doubt great mineralogical advantages. At a short distance from our establishment, there are certain indications of iron and coal—these two articles are the most important for this country. The river Pembina furnishes water power for any force required; there is also stone in abundance, and very easily obtained.

Though I have tried to be as laconic as possible, I fear I have occupied you too long. Nevertheless, not to refuse to 240 gratify you, I will give you the biography you asked of me.

BIOGRAPHY OF GEORGE ANTOINE BELCOURT.

George Antoine Belcourt , was born on the Bay of Febre or St. Antoine, district of Three Rivers, Lower Canada, in 1803, of an honest mechanic, of small fortune, who, seeing the aptitude of his son for study, placed him at the college of Nicolet. After having passed through his classes with success, he embraced the ecclesiastical state, and took a course of theology. He was professor there at the same time of mathematics and astronomy. Made a priest in 1827, he acted as vicar in the town of Three Rivers, and several other places; thence he received a mission for the curacy of St. Francis, on the river of the same

name, and soon after was named to the curacy of St. Martin, on the river Chateaugay, on the place which was celebrated for the victory of General Salisbury over General Hampden . In 1830, Bishop Provencher came down the Red River and traveled in Canada in search of a priest who was suitable to labor solely in christianizing the savage. In answer to all inquiries, general suffrage united on this young curate. He demanded him of the Bishop of Quebec, and Mr. Belcourt received orders to go into the north country. Having arrived at Red River, the 19th of June, 1831, he applied himself with ardor to the study of the Saulteur language. By means of research and study he discovered the principles of the language, which he arranged and caused to be printed in 1839; also a book of piety in this tongue. He composed a dictionary which would form a large quarto, but which for want of encouragement has never been printed. This dictionary, French and Saulteur, gives the etymology of each word, and the composite particles, which throws much light upon the knowledge of this language, and enables one to seize the genius of it—a thing so essential to him who desires to understand the people in general.

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After having traveled, formed missions, built chapels, etc., in divers places, in a space from east to west of about 1000 miles, that is to say, from Rainy Lake to a place on the river Saskadjiwan called *Le Pas* , (*Wabathgweyang* , or Strait of the River,) coursed the river Signe, the river Assiniboine, etc., he returned to pass each winter at his mission of St. Paul, on the river Assiniboine.

In 1833, the haughty conduct of the Hudson Bay Company occasioned a disturbance among the half-breeds which threatened to become serious. After having employed, without success, the influence of the principal personages then of the country, and of the Bishop even, to appease them, Gov. Simpson , knowing the ascendancy Mr. Belcourt possessed over the minds of the half-breeds, went for this missionary, who resided at his mission at St. Paul, about 30 miles from the colony, escorted by the principal persons of the country, and supplicated him to come down to the colony and employ his influence in the establishment of order. The missionary yielded himself most, willingly to

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this demand; then being arrived at the colony, he convoked an assembly, in which he exposed to the people what griefs they had a right to complain of for redress, and made them comprehend what was not just in their pretensions; and authorized them to demand reasonable concessions. These he drew up in the French and English languages, and demanded a public interview with the Governor. This audience took place the next day. The assembly was numerous; everything was peaceably discussed and disposed of in a manner satisfactory to both parties. Then each went away contented. Thus peace was re-established. In gratitude, Governor Simpson added 50 pounds sterling to a like sum which the company gave every year to the Catholic clergy, which they still receive yearly.

In 1837, the exactions of the Hudson Bay Company, and 15 242 their abuse of power, having excited the indignation of the colony, many of them were disposed to go into excesses, which were of a nature to be of no utility to any party. As he possessed all the confidence of the inhabitants, Mr. Belcourt proposed to them to adopt legal measures, and not such as their conscience, and a spirit of honesty must reprove. A petition to the Queen was the means he proposed to try. As no one else felt himself capable of drawing up this document, rather than see things come to an extremity, he undertook it himself. This petition was carried to England by Mr. James Sinclair , and presented to the government by a society of advocates, the zeal of whom merits the warmest praises, particularly Mr. Isbister . This cause made a considerable noise in England. It was vigorously sustained by Mr. Blackstone and others; but favor and money put an end to the discussions.

The indignation of the Hudson Bay Company fell with all its weight upon him who had drawn up the petition; and it was decided in the council of Factors of the Hudson Bay Company, held by Sir George Simpson , that Mr. Belcourt should be driven out the country. This year, 1838, Mr. Belcourt had gone to Canada by way of the United States, and then returned through the Eastern States to Montreal, the same Autumn. Before the departure of Mr. Belcourt , the Factor of the Hudson Bay Company, in charge of the fort of the colony, wishing to annoy him as much as possible, sent and had him arrested by the constable, in the very palace of the bishop, the evening before his departure, and had him

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conducted before a magistrate, where he was forced to submit to a course of questions as insolent as they were unfounded. Such as "Have you traded in furs with the savages?" Now, it was notorious to all that this missionary had never even thought of this branch of occupation. Still further: "Do you think the charter of the company is not 243 valid?" One can see by this that they would have wished to master even the thoughts. This Factor had not yet treated the missionary with sufficient insolence; he sent in pursuit of his carriages some bailiffs, with orders to visit his trunks. Despotism and a spirit of vengeance knows no bounds, even where a regard to honor ought to inspire a different course. All this only served to prove the innocence of Mr. Belcourt , and the gross injustice of his persecutors.

At the arrival of Mr. Belcourt at Montreal, Sir George Simpson , who did not think him so near, had been to make certain depositions before the archbishop of Quebec, threatening to cease all communication with the clergy of Red River if Mr. Belcourt was not recalled. This missionary received, upon his arrival at Montreal, a letter from the archbishop of Quebec, who informed him of his disgrace; and invited him for the peace of the clergy of Red River, to return to Canada. Mr. Belcourt immediately opened a correspondence with Sir George , which lasted several months, with the object of exacting a retraction on his part. He also had several interviews with him; during which Sir George promised all, but never performed anything. Mr. Belcourt had written to Mr. Isbister of the conduct of Sir George . This young advocate, with his accustomed zeal in exposing injustice, had presented this letter to the Society of St. Thomas of Canterbury, the object of which was to defend the rights of Catholics. The secretary of this society wrote immediately by order to the archbishop of Quebec, to ask a confirmation of the truth of this letter, of which he had sent him a copy; advising him at the same time, that this was done with a view of instituting a suit against Sir George . Then Mr. Belcourt informed the Governor of the Hudson Bay Company that there was no time to lose for him; and that if his retraction was not made in formal terms, and in such a manner as was calculated 244 to satisfy him, of which he would exact a copy, all his information would leave by the first post for London, and that he would have to justify himself for his conduct before the Society of St.

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Thomas of Canterbury. This letter was a thunderbolt for Sir George ; and all the measures exacted by Mr. Belcourt were immediately and exactly fulfilled. Then Sir George requested that Mr. Belcourt should be sent again as missionary to Red River; "he acknowledged his services rendered in times of difficulty, and regretted the injuries which had been done him without his knowledge; and blamed the Factor as the author of them. He said he had always been, and was still a sincere friend of Mr. Belcourt ," &c., &c. But this missionary refused his advances, and offered himself to the bishop of Dubuque, for the mission of Pembina. His offer was accepted in a most flattering manner; and since 1849, Mr. Belcourt has been missionary to Pembina, still having it in his power to render to the Saulteurs and half breeds the same services which he rendered to them at first. The retraction of Sir George was announced in the English papers, and the affair rested there.

Since his arrival at Pembina, inundations greater than have taken place there since 1826, caused him to abandon the first establishment formed on Red River, and choose another site infinitely more picturesque, and above all danger of being submerged, at the foot of Mount Pembina.

Pembina , 1853.